776 If on this earth the smallest of rulers, the least of potentates, is surrounded by servants and slaves, could the Creator be without them? If those who form the court of a king are superior to the gouatigi, or "family heads," to the dougoutigi, or "village heads," and to the kafotigi, or "heads of cantons," would those who form the celestial court be inferior to men, to genii, or to demons? The conclusion is perfectly natural; they would be superior to the latter, and to what will he /the Bambara/ compare them? Since they always in every way use themselves as a basis for comparison, they have only to think of themselves in order to remain logical in their conception of the world and to attribute to these beings the nature of their souls, their dousou, which they also call son. Is this not what they have done? When the Bambara define their idea of the soul and want to be understood, have they any other word than this very one, méléké, which they use to designate the angels? It is clear that they do not owe their concept [177] of heaven and the angels to the Moslems; they have appropriated from a foreign language a word which corresponded to a concept they already had, and that is all.

776 However, I am told that they have only one word to designate 177 the Divinity, the Only God, and that word is the Islamic term itself, 192 Alla. They have no other, and the first missionaries, doubtless 196 through ignorance of the pagans' hatred of the Moslems, adopted it, thus creating a hindrance to their ministry (1). Yes, Alla is the term

797 1. By translating as Alla both God and our concept of the Divinity, the first missionaries failed to establish the profound division which should exist between Catholicism and Islamism. The pagans regard the Catholic and the Moslem, as cousins, if not as brothers, and the word Alla is not irrelevant to this view. Because the Catholics believe in the Old Testament, they seem in the eyes of the Negro to border on Islamism, and the departure from it into Christianity

197 seems to them like membership in a sect derived directly from Islamism. The Moslems help with all their might to further belief in this nonsense. Therefore the missionaries should delete from their catechisms the word Alla for "God," as well as the ridiculous word mori for "priest," the word néma for "grace," etc., etc. -- in a word, all that is not Bambara.

176 they use in everyday language when they speak of God, but in the be-
177 ginning did they not have another, and do they not still have one at
192 present? /76/

196 I have always been surprised at the Negro's readiness to call a divine blessing by the name of its Author, and when in the winter he receives the blessing of blessings, the rain that makes plants sprout and the harvest grow, this is the way he expresses himself: "Alla bi fign, Alla bi na, Alla bi kouloukoulou, Alla bi yégé yégé, Alla do, etc., God darkens, God comes, God rumbles, God flashes, it is God," etc. These are purely metaphoric expressions, which mean: "The clouds gather; it will rain; the thunder rumbles; there are flashes of lightning, it is the rain."

I have found these metaphors on their lips also with exactly the same meaning but this time in Bambara words: "Sa bi fign, sa bi na, sa bi kouloukoulou, sa bi yégé yégé, sa do," the meaning is likewise: "The clouds gather; it will rain; the thunder rumbles; there are flashes of lightning; it is the rain." The word sa is strictly Bambara and so cannot reasonably be regarded as more recent than the Arab word; the Negroes therefore had it before they knew the word Alla. The word did not mean "cloud," "thunder," "lightning," or "rain," and there is every reason to believe that there was a time when it awakened in their minds a concept identical with that which the word Alla awakens in them at present, and that this word Alla from a foreign language is only used to express a concept long held by them.

776 What is the meaning of the word sa? Could it be the original
•196 name of the Divinity? Since certain Bantu tribes have a high regard for snakes and dedicate a cult to them, some Europeans have wanted to see in it a translation of the word "snake." That is a great and fundamental error. The word sa, "snake," and the word sa in the sentences sa bi fign, sa bi na, etc., may have the same spelling, but
[194] the pronunciation is different. The hard "s" of sa, "snake," is pronounced by opening the teeth slightly and protruding the lips, and the word sa in sa bi fign, etc., is pronounced by closing the teeth and pulling in the lips. Thus, these are two quite distinct words. Moreover, to claim the snake is, or has been, the Bambara divinity seems to me a piece of stupidity. If they do not claim any bond of real or physical kinship even with the animals that are their taboo, one must believe a fortiori that they would not claim /77/ an animal, even a snake, as Creator and sovereign Lord. Some Bambara have it as a family taboo, and a branch of the Mande people have such great respect for the python Minia (1) that now they are known only by the

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1. The Baganda of Uganda before they became Christian venerated the snake as the dwelling place of a demon. Their snake has a great resemblance to the animals that are family taboos for the Bambara, or better still, to the python Minia, taboo of the Mande branch commonly known under the name of Minia-n-ka. Since the Minia-n-ka derive their name from the word Minia, name of the snake that is venerated and an object of public worship, some have insisted that the Bambara or Bamana derive their name from the word Bama, meaning "cayman" /a species of alligator/. If the cayman, Bama in

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the Bambara language, had given its name to the people, this animal would be taboo for them, as the Minia is taboo for the Minianka, and the Mani or Mali, the hippopotamus, is taboo for the Malinke. None of this is true of the cayman in Bambara country: it is in no way the taboo of the tribe. Moreover, the word Bamana could just as well come from the word bama, a kind of tench /a fresh-water fish of the carp family/ which is found in abundance in the Bani and the Niger. This idea has not occurred to the partisans of the cayman, who undoubtedly are not familiar with the fish called bama. The word Bambara comes from the word bamba which means "rebel" and, in the mouths of the Moslems, carries the meaning of Kafri. Bambara means "the rebel who has never submitted to Islam," and the Negroes of the west speak of Bamako or Bambako, "the river of the rebels." Father Copte, a student of the Bambara recognized by the Negroes of the Ségou, quickly understood this fact and noted it in his accounts in the Annals of the White Fathers. Mr. De Lafosse, an administrator most conversant with the native laws, customs, and ways, recognized it also, and I share their opinion concerning the name Bambara.

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name of Minia-n-ka, the people of the Minia snake. But have the Minianka ever worshipped, or do they still worship, the snake as their

776 196 God, their supreme deity? They are not that stupid, the snake is an ordinary taboo, the dwelling place of a genie, an infernal spirit or a demon, and nothing more.

The word sa in the sentences sa bi fign, sa do, etc. ("the clouds gather, it is the rain," etc.), has a broad and vague meaning, indicating everything that is on high, everything that is above us. Was this word in the past the very name of the Divinity, as the word Alla is for many today? I do not think so. The word sa was the veiled term used to speak of the Divinity and, like the word Alla, it originally expressed a concept or an idea, and not a "being" at all.

Since, according to Bambara ideas, God is a spirit dwelling above us with His court and angels, the expressions sa bi na, sa bi /78/ fign, sa bi kouloukoulou, sa-dji, etc., should be interpreted to mean: "Min bé sa-n-fé bi na, Min bé sa-n-fé bi fign, Min bé sa-n-fé bi kouloukoulou, Sa-n-fe ta dji -- He Who (the spirit which) is up above comes (will favor us with His blessing of rain); He Who is above darkens (gathers clouds); He Who is above rumbles (makes His voice heard); the water of Him Who is above."

776 196 192 The supreme blessing that the Divinity, the Supreme Being, grants to human beings, is rain. As I shall demonstrate in a moment, the Bambara were unable to speak the name of their God and in their gratitude used a metaphor. Their fact that their metaphor, Alla bi na, Alla bi fign, is identical to the one in which the word sa appears, i.e., sa bi na, sa bi fign, etc., leads me to think, nay forces me to think, that in the beginning the word Alla expressed less an individual or a being than an idea or a concept. For I must confess that although some of our Bambara have the very ideas of the Moslems concerning God and the word Alla, there are more whose ideas on this subject remain confused, and for the majority God or Alla is nothing more than the arch of heaven (1), a covering which hides from us a "Spirit,"

1. To pagan Negroes, God is a spirit Who is everywhere, sees everything, but remains ens quantum. He dwells on high, is as large as the celestial vault, and because He hovers above us

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> sees everything. The old men explain this to you with an intensity that proves their good faith, and children recite the sayings of the old men with a frankness so naive that one cannot misunderstand it.

a Being endowed with reason and all powerful. The term is the translation of the word sa.

It is apparent that in the beginning the word Alla in no way meant a Being or an Individual; it simply expressed a concept, an idea already known, accepted and translated by the word sa, and the Bambara simply adopted a foreign word corresponding to their own concept.

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If to the Bambara the word Alla had meant the Divinity Himself, the Supreme Being, would they ever have dared to speak it, to make it their own? I cannot bring myself to believe that they would, among them the name of a powerful person, a religious chief, or venerated being is never spoken in vain or in an unsuitable manner. If some of their kings, among them /79/ N'golo, not to mention others, punished anyone caught speaking his /the royal/ name by fines and prison, cast them into slavery, and even beheaded them as guilty of the crime of lese majesty, what would they not have to fear from the Creator if they spoke His name in vain and inappropriately! Furthermore, it is a widespread custom to avoid speaking the name of one who is feared or venerated.

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No well-bred and self-respecting woman ever speaks the name of her husband. She speaks of him as né tigi ("my master"), so tigi ("the master of the house"). Most frequently she adorns him with a borrowed name, a bougna toua, or name of respect, and a polygamist has several such names, each wife giving him one of her own invention.

In well-brought-up families -- and most of them are (1) -- the

> 1. Our Bambara Negroes have great respect for the members of their families and are considerate of them;